

KID CONNECTS WEEKLY NEWSLETTER: COMMUNICATION AND STAFF SUPPORT PART 2

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FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT:

Contact our warm line at, (303) 245-4418, to talk directly to an Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant.



In our conversations with directors over the past few months, they have expressed great concern for staff morale. Directors are wanting to support staff as best they can. We have also heard that some centers have struggled with communicating and enforcing guidelines with some parents. In this issue we tackle several themes: how to support your staff during a pandemic and how to effectively communicate with parents. We have also included questions for directors to encourage self-reflection on their engagement with staff as well as tips to actively listen. We hope you find it helpful. As always, please reach out to our warm line for any questions or concerns (303)245-4418 or to the Kid Connects' supervisor, Beth Garrett-Myers, at bgarrett@mhpcolorado.org

Questions for Self-Reflection: How am I engaging/supporting staff?

- What are my perspectives and assumptions and how might they be impacting my choices and opinions related to staff?
- Am I acting as a positive role model to my staff? If so, how?
- Am I approachable? What may be impeding with my staff's ability to approach me?
- Am I attuned with my staff's needs? How do staff members communicate their needs to me?
- Are there things I could be doing to increase my staff's morale, comfort level in the workplace, etc.?
- Are there times I feel more connected with staff? Are there times I feel disconnected? What are ways to improve connection with staff?
- In what ways am I providing emotional support to my staff? Would I be able to recognize when staff need more support?
- Am I feeling stress at home? How is that impacting my interactions at work or at home?

Actively Listen to staff:

- Make visible gestures such as nodding, smiling, to let people know you are listening¹
- Maintain clarity, ask clarifying questions, or summarize what you heard so far
- Don't pass judgement. It is tempting to interject with a "But..." when you disagree. Wait until the speaker is finished and feels heard before responding.
- Respond with kindness. State your opinion kindly instead of jumping to a conclusion that is harsh or attacking their opinion.



¹ Mckitrick, Ann. 2020. Texas Childcare Training. Effective Communication in Childcare Centers. Retrieved from: <<https://www.exaschildcaretraining.com/anns-blog/effective-communication-childcare-centers/>>

Supporting Staff During COVID-19 Health Pandemic

Provide Emotional Support

- Discuss work-life balance with staff²
- Virtual weekly meetings to share life updates and conflicts that may be occurring
- Let employees know that they are being cared for and that you want them to feel comfortable discussing work-family related challenges

Serve as a Role Model

- Define your own boundaries and preferences regarding work hours, response times and disclosure around family obligations
- Use time off and sick leave when needed and encouraging staff to do the same

Provide Instrumental Support

- Regularly inform staff of changes from public health and safety standards, discuss impacts of the changes
- Setting regular check-ins (1:1 if possible)
- Identifying when an employee seems overwhelmed, and clarify work priorities by focusing on the critical few
- Listen to employees' work-life conflicts, creatively brainstorm solutions together

Engage in Creative Work-Family Management

- Setting standards and adapting work processes to improve work-family balance
 - Consider flexible work options and make sure staff members are aware of each other's schedule and availability to enable them to switch shifts as needed
 - Considering and expressing empathy for your staff's new work-life conflicts
 - Establishing email and meeting guidelines, defining clear expectations for when and how staff should track their work, share updates and complete a task.

Communicating with parents

As regulations and guidelines change in response to COVID-19 it will be important that you keep parents informed. This is no easy task, especially as communication with parents is more limited with changes in pick up and drop off procedures. Communication is essential. Taking some time to think through how to effectively communicate with parents can save you time and energy in the future.



1. Begin by explaining how and when you'll be in touch with them. Establish a plan for how information will be communicated. Will you be contacting parents by email, phone, or text? Or will communication occur at pick up or drop off? It will also be important to discuss when parents should expect to hear from you. Will you only be communicating if there is a change in guidelines or will you have daily, weekly, or monthly communication?

² Hammer, Leslie, PhD. 2020. 4 Key Strategies to help supervisors support employee well-being during COVID-19. Retrieved from: <<https://blogs.ohsu.edu/occupational-health-sciences/2020/03/25/4-key-strategies-to-help-supervisors-support-employee-well-being-during-covid-19/>>

2. Be clear and provide an explanation. When communicating with parents around changes, make sure that you describe exactly what will occur and why. Providing information both verbally and in writing may prevent confusion.

3. Allow parents to ask questions. Give space for parents to ask questions. You may have an answer and you may not. If you are not able to answer the question, reassure the parents that you will investigate and follow-up with them.

Most families will follow the guidelines willingly. Others may be frustrated by the changes and inconveniences they cause. There will also be parents that are not willing to comply with guidelines. If you encounter resistance, try the following:

- 1. Mindfully self-regulated.** Notice what is coming up for you when you encounter resistance. Are you are feeling stressed, defensive, angry etc.? Take a breath. Use a skill to regulate yourself in the moment such as deep breathing, positive self-talk, or inward validation of your own feelings; “I’m feeling annoyed by this parent, but I’ve had a lot of hard conversations before and I can get through this!”
- 2. Describe what you are wanting and why.** Be clear with what you are requesting and provide a brief rationale. Using the example of a parent not wanting to wear a mask at drop off and pick up, communicating to the parent WHY it is important, and where you are coming from in the request, might help ease tension. “Per county requirements, I need you to wear your mask when dropping off your child.”
- 3. If possible, communicate an understanding of the parent’s position.** It can be challenging to empathize and see another person’s perspective when in the mist of a disagreement, however, it can help a person feel understood and lower defenses. For example, “It seems like you have mixed feelings about the masks.”
- 4. Reiterate your position.** Repeat your request and again provide a rationale. “I need to follow county requirements to ensure the safety of the staff and the families we serve. Please wear your mask at pick up and drop off.”

Remember, validating another person’s feelings does not mean you are agreeing with them or placating. You can validate a feeling while holding a boundary. “It seems like you have mixed feelings about the masks, I understand that AND we have regulations we need to abide by to keep everyone healthy and safe”

Encountering resistance is a challenge. If you need more support around a specific situation, please reach out to our warm line.

